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CHINA

## 'Killing the Chicken To Scare the Monkeys'

Luo Chengxun was a newsman who enjoyed the best of two worlds. A respected communist newspaper editor in Hong Kong since 1948, he had Peking's authority—and an expense account—to cultivate noncommunists. He mingled with diplomats, journalists and Chinese intellectuals of every political stripe; a cautious emissary, he never strayed far from Peking's line of the moment. But in April 1982, he made a routine trip to China—and never returned.

Peking suddenly announced last week that a Chinese court had sentenced him to 10 years in prison. The charge: selling secrets to United States intelligence.

Luo pleaded guilty to the crimes, said the official Xinhua news agency, and waived his right of appeal. Washington refused any immediate comment on the espionage accusation, the first of its kind since the normalization of relations with Peking in 1979. Luo might have been a knowing or an unknowing spy; given China's broad definition of state secrets, any official business discussed with foreigners could be labeled treason. But diplomats in Hong Kong and Peking who knew Luo are not convinced he was a secret agent; he may have been the latest scapegoat in the continuing erosion of Sino-American relations. With his web of Western contacts, Luo may have antagonized party hard-liners. The U.S. Information Agency had invited him to visit the United States on an exchange program for foreign journalists. Just before his disappearance, Luo had informally accepted the offer. Party higher-ups might have accused him of intending to defect to the West.

**Snatched:** Luo's stature in the Communist Party drew special attention to his case, but he was only one of many Hong Kong residents to be snatched by police on recent trips to China. Xinhua bracketed the news of Luo's case with announcements that two other Hong Kong men had also received long terms in prison for having "seriously harmed our people's democratic dictator-

ship"—supposedly by supplying secrets to Taiwan. By cracking down on a few readily available victims, China may hope to dissuade some of its citizens who might be fascinated by the West. "There is an old Chinese proverb that describes exactly what we have just seen happen to Luo," said a Western diplomat in Peking. "It's called 'killing the chicken to scare the monkeys'."

The spy cases coincided with a wide-ranging shake-up of the top communist hierarchy in Hong Kong. The director of the leftist newspaper Wen Wei Po was recently recalled to China for a transfer. Xinhua's Hong Kong first director, Wang Kuang, who heads the Communist Party apparatus in the colony, will also be replaced by Xu Jiatun, former governor of Jiangsu Province. The moves are seen as a sign that Peking wants absolutely reliable people in place for the next decade, as the British lease on the colony nears its expiration in 1997. As a consequence, China watchers in Hong Kong may soon find themselves cut off from inside information about the Middle Kingdom. And some Chinese in Hong Kong may think twice before visiting the mainland. "I don't want to be grabbed," said Lu Ken, an intellectual who came to Hong Kong from China in 1978. Lu's own case offered reason enough for caution: arrested as a "rightist" in the 1950s, he spent 18 years in Chinese prisons.

KIM ROGAL with MELINDA LIU in Hong Kong and  
LARRY ROHTER in Peking